

by Thomas May
[9.]
A
DISCOURSE
CONCERNING
THE SUCCESSE
OF
Former Parliaments.

By THOMAS MAY, *Esquire.*

The second Edition.



LONDON,
Printed by T. F. for Thomas Wakeley.
1644.

DISCOURSE

THE SUCCESS

Foreign Princes

BY THOMAS MAY, Esq.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

LONDON.

Printed by T. F. for T. and W. A. 1744.



A DISCOURSE

Concerning
Former Parliaments.

SIR:



Have, according to my small ability, and the shortness of time, fulfilled your command, in sending to you this brieft and plain Discourse concerning the ancient

opinions and esteeme of English PARLIAMENTS (for that was all which you desired) without any reflection upon the proceedings of this present Parliament: accept

as a plaine peece of common talk, which I would have delivered, had I beene present with you : Such discourses need no dresse of Rhetorique.

THe constitution of our English Monarchy is by wise men esteemed one of the best in Europe, as well for the strength and honour of the Prince, as the securitie and freedome of the People ; and the Basis, on which both are founded, is the conveniencie of that great Councell, the High Court of PARLIAMENT.

Without which neither can the Prince enjoy that honour and felicitie, which *Philip de Commynes*, a forrainer, so much admires, where he delivers what advantages the Kings of ENGLAND have by that Representative Body of their people, by whose assistance in any action they can neither want meanes, or lose reputation. Nor on the other side, can the people have any possibilitie of pleading their owne rights and liberties. For in the *Interim* betweene Parliaments, the People are too scartered and confused a body, to appear in vindication of their proper interests ; and by too long absence of such Assemblies they would lose all. For (as *Junius* observes) *Populus auctoritatem suam tacite non utendo amittit ; sic plerumque accidit ut quod omnes curare tenentur curet nemo, quod omnibus commissum est, nemo sibi commendatum putet :* The People insensibly lose their power for want
of

of using it : for so it happens, that what all should look after, no man does ; what is committed to all, no man thinks his owne charge.

And in that *Interim* it happens, that those *Optimates Regni* (as he speaks) who under the Prince are entrusted with Government, meaning Councillours, Judges, and other great Magistrates, either through feare, flatterie, or private corruption, doe often betray the peoples rights to the Prince.

The state of government standing thus ; If distempered times happen to be (as our Chronicles have shewed some) where by dissention betweene Prince and People, the Kingdomes ruine hath beene endangered, it doth not so much prove that the English government is not the best, as that the best government may be abused. For in everie Monarchy, how limited soever, the Prince his person is invested with so much Majestie, that it would seeme a mockerie in State, if there were no considerable power entrusted into his hands ; yea, so much as that, if he be bad or weak, he may endanger the ruine of the Kingdome ; so necessary is it for all humane ordinances, how wise soever, to leave somewhat to Chance, and to have alwayes need of recourse to God, for his assisting or curing Providence.

And though the Kingdome of England, by vertue of the government thereof, will be as hardly brought into a confusion, as any in Europe ; yet there is no warrant against the possibility of it.

For it was ever heretofore seene, that our Parliaments were rather a strength and advantage to an honourable wise Prince, than a remedy against a bad or weake one; or, if wee change the expression, they were rather an excellent diet to preserve a good raigne in strength, than Physick to cure a bad one; and therefore have been as much loved by sound and healthy Princes, as loathed by them that were out of temper; the later having thought them a depression of their dignitie: as the former have esteemed them an advantage to their strength. So that in such times only the true convenience of that great Councell hath been perceived by England, and admired by forreine Authors: in the other times it was, that those wittie complaints have been in fashion (as Sir *Robert Cotton* speaks of a bad time) that Princes in Parliaments are lesse than they should be, and Subjects greater. But on the contrary, that they have been an advantage to Kings, the constant *Series* of our historie will shew. 1. By those great achievements which they have enabled our wise Kings to make, who were most constant in calling them, and consenting to them. 2. That no one Prince was ever yet happie without the use of them.

It may therefore seeme a Paradox, that any Prince should disaffect that which is so high an advantage to him, and a great wonder, that some Kings of England, not vicious in their dispositions, nor very shallow in their understandings, have

have so much kicked against Parliaments. And that such have been (before we shew what reasons may be of it) see the characters of some Princes, whose successes and fortunes are knowne to all that read the histories, as they are delivered by *Polidore Virgil*, who in his sixteenth book speaks thus of Henry the third: *Fuit ingenio miti, animo magis nobili quam magno, cultor religionis, adversus inopes liberalis*. Hee was of a gentle nature, a mind rather noble than great, a lover of religion, and liberall to the poore.

In his eighteenth Book thus of Edward the second; *Fuit illi natura bona, ingenium mite, quem primo juvenili errore actum in leviora vitia incidentem, tandem in graviora malorum consuetudines & consilia traxerunt. Non deerant illi animi vires, si repudiatis malis, suavoribus illis jussu exercuisset*. He was of a good nature and mild disposition, who first by the errours and rashnesse of youth falling into small faults, was afterwards drawne into greater, by the societie and counsels of wicked men. There was not wanting in him a strength of mind, if avoyding evill counsell, hee could have made a just use of it.

And in his twentieth Book thus of Richard the second; *Fuit in illo spiritus non vilis, quem consociarum improbitas, & insulfitas extinxit*. Hee was of a spirit not low or base, but such as was quite destroyed by the wickednesse and folly of unhappie Consociates.

A reason of this accident may be, that their
soules

Soules, though not vicious, have not been so large, nor their affections so publike, as their great calling hath required; but being too much mancipared to private fancies and unhappy Favourites, and long flattered in those affections under the specious name of firmnesse in friendship, (not being told that the adaequate object of a Prince his love should be the whole people, and that they who receive publike honour, should returne a generall love and care) they have too much neglected the Kingdome, and grow at last afraid to look their faces in so true a glasse as a Parliament, and flying the remedy, encrease the disease, till it come to that unhappie height, that rather then acknowledge any unjust action; they strive for an unjust power to give it countenance, and so by a long consequence become hardly reconcilable to a Parliamtarie way.

Such Princes (though it may seeme strange) have beene a greater affliction to this Kingdome; than those who have been most wicked, and more incnrable for these reasons. 1. They have not been so conscious to themselves of great crimes; and therefore are not so apt to be sensible of what they have beene accidentally made to doe against their people by evill counsell, whose poyson themselves did not perfectly understand. And therefore they are more prone to suspect the people, as unkind to them, than themselves as faultie, and so the more hardly drawne to repent their actions, or meet heartily with a Parliament. 2. The second reason

reason is from the People, who naturally¹¹ looke
 with honour upon the Prince, and when¹² they find
 none or few personall vices in him (not¹³ considering that the true vertues of Princes have a larger
 extent than those of private men) will more
 hardly be brought to think, though themselves
 feeble, and suffer for it, that he is faultie; and there-
 fore sometimes (which would hardly be beleaved
 if experience had not shewed it) the People have
 been so rash as that to maintaine for the King an
 unjust Prerogative, which themselves understand
 not, they have to their owne ruine, and the Kings
 too (as it hath after proved) deserted that great
 Counsell whom themselves have chosen, and by
 whom only they could be preserved in their just
 rights; untill too late, for the Kings happinesse
 and their owne, they have seene and repented their
 great folly.

Such a desertion was too sadly seene at the end
 of that Parliament of EDWARD the second, where
 the two *Spencers* were banished, and the tragickall
 effects that followed, when the King found so great
 a partie both of Clergie and Laitie, as enabled
 him to call home againe his banished Favourites,
 and proved fatall to so many Parliamentarie
 Lords, as the like execution of Nobilitie had ne-
 ver before beene seene in ENGLAND: over whose
 graves the People afterwards wept when it was
 too late, and proceeded further in their revenge,
 than became the dutie and allegiance of Subjects.

It is therefore a great mis-fortune to England,

and almost a certaine calamitie, when the distempers of government have been let grow so long, as that for their cure they must need a long Parliament. For there are no wayes, how just, how moderate soever they be, which that great Councell can take (if they go far enough to make the cure) but will provoke, either by the meanes, or the length of them, the Prince his impatience, or the Peoples inconstancie.

For the first; the Delinquents must needs be many and great, and those imployed, and perchance highly favoured by him, besides the reflexion which is made upon his judgment by their sufferings, and that will be one reason of his impatience.

Another is, that many Prerogatives which were not indeed inherent in the Crowne, but so thought by the Prince, and by him and his bad Councell long abused, to the prejudice of the People, with some seeming advantage to him (though well weighed they brought none) are then after a long sufferance called in question.

For the people are used to entrust kind Princes with many of their owne rights and priviledges, and never call for them againe till they have beene extremely abused. But at such a time to make all cleare after so long a reckoning (and those long reckonings in State being commonly fatall; for Parliaments have seldome been discontinued, but by such Princes whose governments in the *Interim* have been very illegal) they

usually

usually question so much, as that the Prince thinks himselfe hardly dealt withall, such a Prince as we spoke of, who not bad in himselfe, but long misled by wicked counsell, was not enough sensible of the injuries he had done.

The second obstacle that such Parliaments may find is the Peoples inconstancie; and what age is not full of such examples which before we name, let us consider whether there be any reason for it? This perchance may be one, that the People naturally are lovers of noveltie, affecting with greedinesse every change, and againe loathing it when it ceases to be a noveltie. Long discontinued and reforming Parliaments seemes to carrie the face of a change of government, and those things may then happen which doe in the shift of Princes, that some People may for a while flatter themselves with new and strange hopes, that prove frustrate; or else with quicker redresses of inconvenience, than the great concurrence of so many weightie businesses can possibly admit, how industrious soever that great Councell be, distracted with so great a varietie; and the people after some time spent, grow wearie againe of what before they had so long wished to see. Besides, the people are more and more poysoned daily by the discourses of the friends, kindred, and retainers to so many great Delinquents, as must needs be at such a Parliament: who, though they be no considerable party in respect of the whole Common-wealth, yet ply their particular interests.

with more eagernesse than most doe the publike. They subtilly perswade the people, that whatsoever the Parliament does against those great Delinquents is aimed against the Kings honour, and that he is wounded thorow their sides. And this opinion is somewhat furthered, when the People see how many prerogatives of the Prince (as wee said before) are after long enjoying called in question. So that by this meanes their inconstancie seemes to be grounded upon loyaltie to the King, and they (perchance with honest, but deceived hearts) grow wearie of the great Councell of the Land.

Another reason may be, that the Prince himselfe averse from such a Parliament, for the reasons aforesaid, can find power enough to retard their proceedings, and keep off the cure of State so long, till the People tired with expectation of it, have by degrees forgot the sharpnesse of those diseases, which before required it.

By this meanes at last, accidentally a miracle hath been wrought after a long Parliament, which is, that the People have taken part with the great Delinquents against the Parliament; for no other reason, than because those Delinquents had done them more wrong than the Parliament could suddenly redresse. And so the multitude of those great Delinquents crimes hath turned to their owne advantage.

But in such reforming Parliaments, upon whom so much businesse lyes, not onely the inconstancie
of

of the People hath been seene in historie, but the
 unitedfastnesse of the Representative Body it self,
 and the distractions of that Assembly, whilst they
 forsake each other under so great a burden, have
 let that burden fall dishonourably to the ground.
 The most unhappie instance in this case, was that
 Paroliment of *Richard* the second begun at West-
 minster, and adjourned to Shrewsbury in the nine-
 teenth yeare of his raigne; a Parliament that dis-
 charged their trust the worst of any that I read of;
 where there was as much need of constancie and
 magnanimitie as ever was, to redresse those great
 distempers which were then growne upon the
 State; and as much mischief ensued by their de-
 fault, both upon Prince and People, which might
 have beene well prevented, and his happinesse
 wrought together with their owne (in the judge-
 ment of best Writers) if they had timely and
 constantly joyned together in maintaining the
 true rights of Parliament, and resisting the ille-
 gall desires of their seduced King. But being fa-
 tally distracted, the major part of Lords and Bi-
 shops wrought upon by the King, and the House
 of Commons too far prevailed with by *Busby* the
 Speaker, and his Instruments, they utterly deser-
 ted the Common-wealth, and looking only upon
 the Kings present desire, assented to such things
 as made the Prerogative a thing boundlesse; that
 he himselfe (as the Storie reports) was heard glo-
 rying to say, That there was no free and absolute
 Monarch in Europe but himselfe. Upon which,

the same bad Councell which had before brought him out of love with Parliaments, brought him to as great an abuse of that power which hee had now gotten over a Parliament. And then followed the blank Charters, and other horrid extortions, besides the suffering of some Lords, whom the people most loved; and shortly after, by a sad consequence, his owne ruine. Nor doe wee read that any of those Lords, who under colour of Loyalty and love (as they called it) to his person, had trodden downe the power and priviledge of a PARLIAMENT under his feet, had afterwards so much Loyalty to him, as to defend his Crowne and Person against the force of an Usurper, who without any resistance or contradiction unjustly ascended the Royall Throne: the sad occasion of that miserable and cruell civill war, which in the following ages so long afflicted this Kingdome of ENGLAND. This was the worst example of any Parliament; but in other times, though bad too, they have proved better Physick than any other earthly wayes or meanes could be; yet their greatest vertue and excellencie is seene, when they have been used as a diet by honourable and just Princes, such as this Nation hath been often blessed with; and such who have thought it no disparagement or depression of their dignitie, to be ruled by the sway of that great Councell, than a wise guider of a ship would think it to follow his Compasse, or any Mathematician to be directed by his necessary rules and instruments.

FINIS.

